

Editorials

Dr. Kissinger And the Wiretaps

SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER'S extraordinary press conference at which he raised the possibility of resigning was not his coolest diplomatic performance. He burst upon the world's attention at an astonishingly ill-timed moment seeking an outlet for his wounded sensibilities and upset feelings arising from the curious case of the 17 wiretaps.

Dr. Kissinger was visibly tired, justifiably so, when he indulged in this outburst. No doubt by now a sufficient number of warm friends will have been heard from, even in the frenzy of the Cairo reception yesterday, to dissuade him from any further thought of resigning his office. Everyone must hope so.

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THE KISSINGER ACCOMPLISHMENTS in advancing American foreign policy have been brilliant and his services can't be spared. As for his role in the 1969-71 wiretaps, the full account that he has given of it seems to leave him in no position of personal dishonor.

The facts appear to be that the FBI was asked—by precisely whom is unclear—to make wiretaps as a defense against leaks of foreign policy decisions and actions. Seventeen taps were made—13 of officials, four of newsmen. Kissinger did supply the names of people on his staff who fell into certain security categories. He did see summaries of tapped conversations. He understood that previous Presidents had used wiretaps and he thought that national security warranted them.

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IN THOSE YEARS, such wiretaps were not illegal. Therefore, no illegality or even dishonor would attach to an admission by Kissinger that he had asked for them to be made. The suspicion has been raised by what he objects to as "selective leaks" that Dr. Kissinger did in fact make such a request of the FBI. He, however, says the President ordered the wiretaps, that his office "did not initiate any requests for wiretaps" except in the sense of supplying, on request, the names of certain individuals in certain security categories.

The pain and anguish that the Secretary of State says he has suffered have led seasoned Washington politicians to ask, "What's the matter, can't he take it?" Dr. Kissinger has gone along for five years without expressing press criticism; he has deservedly been well, almost rapturously, treated. But lately he has been reading some newspaper editorials that have questioned his credibility, and now he is back by his own request before the Foreign Relations Committee for a rehearing on the wiretaps issue. He will, we feel sure, get a fair one. Meanwhile, Senator Aiken is right to remind him that being criticized is part of the business and he would be a damn fool to resign.